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50C4-01.2 A Man Called Intrepid : The Secret War
P- Stevenson, William

Superspies

A MAN CALLED INTREPID: THE SECRET WAR. *By William Stevenson. 486 pages. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $12.95.* BODYGUARD OF LIES. *By Anthony Cave Brown. 947 pages. Harper & Row. $15.95.* THE SPYMASTERS. *By Charles Whiting. 240 pages. Saturday Review/Dutton. $8.95.*

With the recent relaxation of Britain's Official Secrets Act, a growing shelf of books calls attention to the "secret war" of espionage and counterintelligence conducted during World War II, in which the British consistently outmaneuvered their opponents. J.C. Masterman's "The Double-Cross System," written in 1945 but published only in 1972, explained the methods by which German spies operating in England were brought under British control and re-employed as double agents. In 1974 F.W. Winterbotham's "The Ultra Secret" revealed that the British had possessed, from the earliest days of the war, a replica of the cipher machine "Enigma," whose codes were believed unbreakable by its German users. Cryptologists working at Bletchley Park, 40 miles from London, were able to anticipate bombing raids, troop movements and even Rommel's battle plans in the North African desert. With some exaggeration, Winterbotham portrayed these coups as "decisive" in winning the war.

Of the three newest entries on this subject, Anthony Cave Brown's gigantic "Bodyguard of Lies" is the most detailed and absorbing. Though his ostensible subject is the achievement of tactical surprise on D Day, his book is really a shapeless compendium of spy stories from far and wide. Cicero, The Man Who Never Was and Monty's Double (who turns out to have been an incorrigible drunk) make cameo appearances. Cave Brown's most disturbing chapter is on Churchill's decision to protect his "most secret source," the Enigma machine, by withholding his 48-hour foreknowledge of the devastating bombing of Coventry. Cave Brown is less clear on the disastrous Dieppe raid of 1942, in which more than half the 6,000 men were casualties. It is at least possible that the failure was intentional, to quench American insistence on a frontal attack on the Continent at this stage of the war.

Debunked: Cave Brown's hero is Sir Stewart Menzies, head of the M.I.6 division of British intelligence, whose career ended in disgrace when Harold (Kim) Philby, whom Menzies had handpicked as his successor, defected to Moscow. Hugh Trevor-Roper, who served in British intelligence, has persuasively debunked Cave Brown's estimation of Menzies's importance and capability. Interviewed in Charles Whiting's "The Spymasters," Trevor-Roper describes Menzies as "a bad judge of men [who] drew his personal advisers from a painfully limited social circle ... I do not think he ever really understood the war in which he was engaged."

"A Man Called Intrepid" proposes that the real head of wartime intelligence was a World War I Canadian flying ace turned multimillionaire inventor, who was Churchill's personal emissary to enlist Franklin D. Roosevelt as an ally. Sir William Stephenson, now living in retirement in Bermuda, is unmentioned in the 900 pages of "Bodyguard of Lies." The reader of these spy books comes to realize that British intelligence was a congeries of fiefdoms, each believing in its own supremacy. Sir William, whose code name was "Intrepid," declares that his BSC (British Security Coordination), which occupied two floors in Rockefeller Center while the U.S. was still neutral, was "the hub for all branches of British intelligence." Hub or not, it was an astonishing operation. According to this account, the accusations of FDR's isolationist foes that he intended to bring this country into the war on Britain's side were well-founded. "I'm your biggest undercover agent," FDR allegedly told Intrepid, and the President knowingly ran the risk of impeachment if his support of a British secret agency on these shores had been discovered.

Flirtation: According to this book, Stephenson's agency supplied FDR with enough damaging evidence of Joseph P. Kennedy's flirtation with the Nazis during his ambassadorship to England to make Kennedy back down from his intention of challenging FDR for the Presidency in 1940. The BSC is further credited with having spiked the career of the isolationist Sen. Burton K. Wheeler. Stephenson was responsible for the formation of an American intelligence service, the OSS, and for recommending to Roosevelt and Churchill that Gen. William (Wild Bill) Donovan, his friend since World War I, be put in charge of it.

"A Man Called Intrepid," execrably written by a near-namesake of its hero, contains brief appearances by minor spies, of whom Greta Garbo is the most surprising and Noel Coward the most amusing: "My celebrity value was a wonderful cover," Coward told the author shortly before his death. "So many career intelligence officers went around looking terribly mysterious—long black boots and sinister smiles ... My disguise was my own reputation as a bit of an idiot."

Hormones: "The Spymasters," the least substantial of these books, spends too much of its short length on trivia—Malcolm Muggeridge collecting bird droppings for invisible ink, a harebrained OSS scheme, approved by Donovan, to inject vegetables for Hitler's table with female hormones in the hope that "his moustache would fall off and his voice become soprano." But Whiting deserves respect for subscribing to no single-hero thesis: he briefly surveys the contributions of Menzies, Stephenson, the cryptologists of Bletchley and far-flung individual operatives. He provides a summary overview of a subject that still awaits its definitive historian.

—WALTER CLEMONS

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